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Senate passes graduation-requirement plan

Cassis amendments allow an alternative approach to Algebra II for some students

LANSING — The Michigan Senate today approved legislation that puts Michigan at the forefront of efforts to create rigorous statewide high-school graduation requirements so young people leave school ready for the 21st century careers and jobs.

Senate Bill 1124 will require students to take four years of English and math; three of science and social studies; and one year of an arts course as well as a health and physical-education course. Included are the requirements that students take biology, geometry and Algebra I and II.

Sen. Cassis, vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Education and a former teacher and school psychologist, offered two amendments that were made part of the legislation. Her amendments will:

- Enable certain 11th- and 12th-grade students to complete an “alternative approach” to Algebra II if a student’s math teacher and school counselor, in consultation with the student and student’s parent or guardian all agree that an alternative approach is the best course of action for that student; and
- Require school districts to report to the local Intermediate School District how many pupils have requested and received the right to take the alternative Algebra II course.

Cassis, R-Nov, said the amendments address a small portion of students who would otherwise struggle and fail Algebra II. The amendments allow students an alternative approach to meeting the benchmarks of Algebra II as put forth by the Department of Education, while monitoring the number of students choosing that option—which ensures that only eligible students enroll in the alternative approach. Her amendments are supported by the Michigan Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the Oakland and Macomb ISDs and the School Counselors Association.

(more)

“My amendments address those who have a history of being academically vulnerable and challenged in mathematics; these students tend to have fragile self-esteem and low academic self-confidence,” said Cassis. “Failure for them breeds more failure, turning into a cycle of failure. By contrast, success, as we all know, breeds success. We want nothing less than success for all so that no child is left behind.

“Our state’s high-school students and society at large will benefit significantly from the important requirements we have implemented. We have increased the education standards in our state so they are more in line with the requirements of our new economy and the education guidelines of other states. Education is a key component connected to the economy and entrepreneurship (the “three Es”) in restoring Michigan’s fiscal competitiveness,” Cassis concluded.

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